



EXHIBIT 4
DATE 3-16-07
SB 103

COLUMBUS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

P.O. BOX 653
COLUMBUS, MONTANA 59019-0653

March 16, 2007

To the House Natural Resources Committee,

I am writing to ask for your support of SB103 which allows Towns to become part of Rural Fire Districts.

Currently state law mandates that Towns and Rural Fire Districts cannot merge together. This creates two separate fire protection areas that many times could just as effectively be served by a single jurisdiction.

Here in Columbus we have that very situation where the Town of Columbus has a fire Department as well as Rural Fire District #3 which completely surrounds the Town. Currently we have no options under current State law which allows us to consolidate these two entities.

I strongly feel that if communities such as ours were given the choice, which is allowed by SB103, then we could provide for a much more effective and cost efficient form of government and fire protection to our local citizens rather than duplicating so many of our efforts.

This bill would give be a major opportunity for communities like Columbus, Red Lodge, Roundup, Laurel, or any where else in Montana that is currently restricted under current law.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RC", written over a horizontal line.

Rich Cowger
Chief
Columbus Fire Department

**Gallatin Canyon Consolidated Rural Fire District**

200 Box 100882
Big Sky, MT 09716
(406) 995-2100

Friday, March 16, 2007

To: Chair Walter McNutt and members of the House Natural Resources Committee

I am a trustee of the Gallatin Canyon Consolidated Rural Fire District. Our District contains about 65 square miles of area. We are responsible for over 13 miles of Highway 191 (the Gallatin Canyon Highway) as well as the Big Sky community, which extends west from Highway 191 for another 12 to 13 miles.

The statute being amended is over 60 years old. It was enacted when fire districts were smaller and the protection was more rudimentary than now.

The problem with the current law is that a minority of land owners of a parcel within a district can cause it to be divided from the district. The county commissioners must approve the petition, unless a majority of land owners owning more than 50% of the land of the ENTIRE ORIGINAL DISTRICT protest. But, in any large district, such as ours, it would be practically impossible to locate, contact, and obtain protests from all land owners within the entire original district in time for the hearing on the petition. The result is the trustees of the district and the other land owners in the district are effectively denied a voice.

New section 11 continues to permit divisions. It does require a more considered process. The persons seeking to divide and detract a portion of land from the district must present a petition to the trustees. More than 50% of the real property owners must petition. A plan for division is required, including a timetable, names of the new districts, effective date, financial impacts, and a method for a fair and equitable division of the assets between the new districts. The plan is then presented to the county commissioners for approval.

This approach is fair to all parties. Please refer SB 103 to the full House with a recommendation of "Do Pass."

Thank you.

Les Loble
Trustee